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### PRESS RELEASE

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## Senate Takes Action to Address Public Defense Unrepresented Crisis

*The Legislature will allocate \$96 million over adjusted current service level to help reform the commission and address the unrepresented crisis*

SALEM – Today, the Oregon Senate passed [Senate Bill 337](#) to respond to the crisis in Oregon's Public Defense System. Access to defense counsel is a constitutional right that too many Oregonians are currently waiting to receive, including approximately 200 people sitting in county jails without an attorney. Addressing this ongoing crisis was a top priority for legislative leaders this session.

It now moves to the House for consideration.

"Coming into this session it was clear voters expected us to address this crisis in our legal system, and with Senate Bill 337 we have fulfilled that responsibility," **said Senate President Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego)**. "This bill will make Oregon a safer and more just state."

Senate Bill 337 takes urgent steps to address this shortage of public defenders by:

- Modifying the composition of the commission, moving the commission from the Judicial Branch to the Executive Branch and changing the name from "Public Defense Services Commission" to the "Oregon Public Defense Commission"
- Reforming the pay structure and increasing pay for public defenders, while prohibiting models shown to lead to less effective representation of defendants.

- Requiring the Oregon Public Defense Commission to set standards for public defenders and report regularly to the legislature on their standards and oversight.
- Updating the model for the employment of public defenders – including establishing a trial division within the commission that directly hires attorneys – and allowing public defense providers across the state to contract directly with the commission.
- Creating regional hubs to directly address the unrepresented crisis

"As a former prosecutor, I know how important it is for every defendant to have legal counsel – it's fundamental to our justice system being fair and functional," **said Senate Majority Lieber Kate Lieber (D-Beaverton)**. "Senate Democrats promised to address the public defense crisis this session and protect fair access to justice. With SB 337 we are delivering on that promise."

To achieve these goals, the Legislature will invest an additional \$96 million over adjusted current service level in the public defense system this session. The money is included in SB 337, Senate Bill 5532 (the agency's budget bill) and Senate Bill 5506 (the budget reconciliation bill).

SB 5532 also includes money to address nonunanimous jury convictions and fully-funds adults and juvenile maximum caseloads. SB 5506 includes funding for victim's services and contingency funds for the unrepresented crises.

"Oregonians deserve justice, which isn't possible if cases are thrown out due to lack of attorneys or defendants are forced to sit in jail for far too long without counsel," **said Senator Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene)**. "I was proud to lead a workgroup with representatives from all three branches of government and public defense providers to design these meaningful reforms to address the public defense crisis."

Improving Oregon's public defense system to protect fair access to justice is a key component of [Senate Democrats' 2023 Oregon Works agenda](#).

Senate Bill 337 is one of hundreds of bills that were threatened by the Senate Republican walkout.

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